DOE NEWS

MEDIA CONTACT:
Colleen French, DOE, 509-373-5985
Geoff Tyree, Fluor Hanford, Inc., 509-372-1145

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 28, 2006

HANFORD WORKERS BEAT CLEANUP MILESTONE
Milestone for retrieving buried waste completed a month early

Workers at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Hanford Site in southeast Washington State have emptied the first of several large trenches holding containers of waste from plutonium production in the 1970s and 1980s. The trench – known as Trench 4 -- held 1,926 cubic meters of waste in 9,960 containers. Completing the work, including designating and moving the waste to a compliant treatment, storage or disposal facility, meets a Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) cleanup milestone due December 31, 2006.

"This trench was a high priority in our retrieval of suspect transuranic waste because of what bad shape the drums were in," said DOE Richland Operations Office Manager Keith A. Klein. "The experience we gained in trenches with less degraded drums was instrumental in making sure this trench could be emptied safely."

In October 2003, contractor Fluor Hanford began retrieving suspect transuranic waste drums and boxes from retrievable storage in Hanford's Central Plateau. The waste is in the form of radioactively contaminated debris, tools, clothing, and other materials generated in the 1970s and 1980s. The waste containers were stacked on asphalt pads, covered with plywood, draped with tarps, and then covered with dirt. Once the drums are retrieved, workers determine whether they contain low-level waste, which can be disposed of in the on-site Environmental Restoration

Disposal Facility; or transuranic waste, which is then prepared for shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico for disposal. Hanford has sent more than 9,200 drums of transuranic waste to WIPP so far.

DOE is on track to remove up to an estimated 15,000 cubic meters (equivalent to approximately 75,000 drums) of radioactive waste by the end of 2010 as required by the TPA.

“Workers encountered more and more corroded drums as the cleanup progressed in Trench 4,” said Dale McKenney, Fluor Hanford vice president of Waste Stabilization and Disposition. “Some of the drums were literally falling apart, but our workers were able to maintain a great safety record, with no recordable injuries during the project.”

McKenney said workers developed innovative ways of removing the corroded drums safely. A “silver bullet” technique was developed to wrap sheet metal around degraded drums so they could be moved. Larger drums, called “overpacks” were lowered over fragile drums. Because workers had to wear protective clothing, hot weather limited the time people could work in the trench over the summer. To keep the workers safe and more comfortable, and still maintain the cleanup schedule, a portable shelter with misting equipment was installed. The shelter also provided some protection from the wind, helping to keep down dust and contamination.

EPA’s Hanford Program Manager, Nick Ceto, believes the lessons learned from retrieval of waste from Trench 4 will be important in planning for future cleanup of Hanford burial grounds. “This work will provide project engineers with valuable experience in designing retrieval strategies that protect workers as they work to retrieve radioactive and chemical waste buried many years ago in unlined trenches.”

Another December 31 TPA milestone calls for DOE to remove the equivalent of 22,600 drums of waste. Work is on schedule to meet that next milestone, with the equivalent of 22,308 drums removed to date.

###

■ *U.S. Department of Energy* ● *Richland Operations Office* ● *P.O. Box 550* ● *Richland, WA 93532* ■